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The public school question.



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By  
**Goldwin Smith, D.C.L.**



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## PREFACE.

THE Ontario System of Common Schools has been well established in the Province, and while these schools have been accepted by many as complete, popular opinion is not by any means altogether in their favor. Dissatisfaction with the common schools is, however, more apparent in cities and towns than in rural districts. The practical results of the present common school education will no doubt in a few years make it more necessary to remodel the system, to make it more flexible and better adapted to the varying needs of the community. The proposal for the affiliation of Voluntary Schools with the Public School system has this end in view, and when it is better understood it will be seen that some such scheme can be adapted to meet many of the difficulties existing in our present educational system.

The accompanying article, which appeared in the January number of the *Canadian Magazine*, written by Professor Goldwin Smith, will be of interest to all concerned with our system of public schools. I beg to acknowledge the kindness of Professor Goldwin Smith, and also of the editor of the *Canadian Magazine* in consenting to have this article published in pamphlet form.

LAWRENCE BALDWIN.

TORONTO, March, 1902.





# The Public School Question

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**I**N addressing the school teachers the other day at the Normal School, Toronto, I disclosed what I fear would be generally regarded as the scandalous fact that I was not a thorough-going believer in the system of State Schools.

I had once an opportunity of hearing this great subject specially well discussed. The British Parliament having, after some tentative efforts through the agency of the Privy Council, decided to take up in earnest the whole question of national education, a Commission was in 1858 appointed to investigate the subject and to prepare a scheme for the consideration of Parliament. Of that Commission I was a member, being appointed, I believe, specially to deal with the charitable foundations, the report on which was consigned to my hands. The Chairman was the Duke of Newcastle, whose name the Commission commonly bears. The other Commissioners were men who represented sections of opinion. A question cannot be debated better than by such a conclave having a practical object of great importance in view, and unrestrained by the presence of reporters. The result in my mind was a leaning in favour of the parental and Voluntary against the State system. That view was embodied in a paper which was signed by one member of the Commission besides myself, and now slumbers among the archives of the Home Office. Being outvoted, we waived our dissent and concurred with our colleagues in carrying on the investigation and submitting recommendations to

Parliament. Being the junior member of the Commission and the only one free from engrossing avocations elsewhere, I did much of the general work and became pretty well posted in details.

The impression which I then formed in favor of the Voluntary system I have always retained, though the State system was so completely established that I saw no use in saying anything about it or in declining to act under it when called upon. In this spirit I accepted the honor tendered me by the Public School Teachers of this Province of representing them in the Council of Instruction. The Council was abruptly dissolved by the Ontario Government in consequence of a collision between it and the Chief Superintendent arising out of an appointment made by the Council to the headship of a Normal School. The incident was one which seemed to throw a sidelight on the liabilities of the State system in its connection with party government, as does that chronic dispute about the school books from which the Voluntary system would be free.

Natural right and duty may on occasion be superseded by State necessity, as in time of public exigency or peril. But they must always be the general basis of institutions, and always demand recognition. It is apparently the natural duty of every man to educate as well as to feed and clothe the children that he brings into the world; nor has he any natural right to cast this duty on his neighbor or on the community at large. It is not in accordance with natural justice that the man who has prudently deferred marriage till he was able to support a family should pay for the imprudence of the man who has brought into the world a family which he is unable to support. On the other hand, the parent has a natural right to say in whose hands he will place the education of his child. The Catholics, being a large and united vote, assert that right against the general principle of the State system. The State has no natural right to take away the child from the parent or those to whom the parent chooses to entrust it. Nor, if the parent is willing to do his own duty, has the State any natural right to tax him for the

immunity of others. The State cannot reasonably say that those upon whom it has conferred political power are imbeciles in the matter of education and incompetent to perform their natural duty or exercise their natural right in respect to the education of their children. Many must be availing themselves of our Public Schools who have sufficient means of providing their children with education. Can it be said that there is any right in these cases to cast the parent's duty upon the tax-payer?

All this, I am afraid, will sound like rank heresy to the theorists who hold that the rights and duties of the individual and the family ought to be surrendered to the State.

Natural right, however, whether of the individual or of the family, must sometimes give way to public exigency. In this case the public exigency, so far as the State is concerned, is the danger of an ignorant electorate. Robert Lowe rather bitterly said, "We must teach our masters to read and write." The fact that the exigency has been created by the rivalry of political parties which has abolished all qualifications for the franchise and puts the ballot into every hand, instead of letting industry and frugality stretch out their hands for it, does not make the peril any less. On the other hand, the security for the voter's intelligence which the State requires might be obtained, without taking away education from the parent, by certified inspection or an educational test. Nor does it seem that the community is in any way bound, or that any public interest would lead it, to go to the expense of imparting any more than a strictly necessary education. To excite and gratify the pupil's ambition of rising above the station in which he happens to have been born, may be a good thing in itself; it certainly is when the person to be so raised is well selected and helped either by private munificence or by State endowments specially devoted to that object. One who assisted in the foundation of Cornell University may fairly say that he has not personally failed to take part in the opening of that door. The State may also properly endow special institutions for instruction in technical science,

scientific agriculture, or other studies which are profitable to the community at large. But the community at large has no interest in the indiscriminate fostering of ambition. On the contrary, an extensive displacement of industry may be economically injurious to the commonwealth. Nor is happiness more than contentment certain to be the fruit of such a policy. As was said in the address to which I have referred, we cannot all actually climb over each other's heads, though restless desire may be kindled in all.

To the exercise of educational charity, of course, there are no limits. Nor may charity be better exercised than in encouraging education and in enabling real ability to attain the station in which it can be most useful to the commonwealth.

A State system of education can hardly fail to be somewhat Procrustean. Its spirit was depicted by the French Minister of Education who boasted that when he rang a bell the same lesson commenced in every school in France. The Voluntary system, on the other hand, if it can be made successful, is flexible, and adapts itself to local, social and industrial circumstance. It has also in it the motive power of emulation, which, in all things, is a stimulus of improvement.

Under the Voluntary system teaching is a profession which the teacher enters expecting to live by it, as he knows that his special gifts and exertions will, in this as in other professions, fetch their proper price. Under the State system teaching is hardly a profession, so far as many of the male teachers are concerned. The man is never sure of earning his fair market value. It is inferred from facts before the Department of Education that the average continuance of a male teacher in the service is between seven and eight years. Other estimates have been still lower.

At the same time a large increase of salaries is hardly possible. The expense already is startling, and has alarmed the Toronto City Council. It may soon seriously interfere with the ability of the city government to provide for its direct and proper objects, such as the police, the thoroughfares, the health and the buildings of the city.

The consequence of this is that education is falling

more and more into the hands of women, who will accept smaller salaries, but are not well qualified to form the character of boys after a certain age. The consequence of this, again, is probably seen in the manners of the boys, of which complaints are heard, and perhaps in a certain lack of some special points of the male character. The devotion even of the young women to the calling, unless they renounce marriage, must generally be short.

Mr. Rice, who has given us the results of an inspection of schools in a number of cities of the United States, reports inequalities almost as great as any which would be likely to be found under the Voluntary system. Some schools are very good. Others are much the reverse. A compliment is incidentally paid to Toronto. But the parent has no choice; he must send his child to the school of his district whether it be good or bad. Under the Voluntary system his choice would be free and would act as a stimulus to the teachers.

A serious feature of Mr. Rice's description is indifference of parents, who regard their duty to the child, including the formation of character, as made over to the State. They will sometimes not even take the pains to inquire into the sanitary condition of the school house. We see that instead of supporting the teacher, as they would if he or she were chosen by them, they are inclined to take the part of the child against him, thus impairing the discipline of the school. Any attractiveness which the common school may have as a social bond among the parents must be impaired where such indifference exists.

The union of the sexes beyond a very early age is a feature of our Public School system which some high authorities view with mistrust. In the United States the Public School system serves the very special function of assimilating the alien elements introduced by an immense immigration.

In the country the Public School system seems to work better than it does in the city; the whole community using the school, which is thus really common; taking an interest in it; having a voice in the selection of a teacher, and keep-

ing the financial management under control. This approaches the old Scotch or New England model.

In the city the opposite of this is the case. The schools are hardly common, the Voluntary school being frequently preferred by those who can afford it. Nobody has a voice in the choice of the teacher of his district. The citizens generally take no active interest in the schools. You risk the usual evils of the system of political election applied to what ought to be a matter of administration. A place on the Board of Trustees is sought apparently, in many cases, less from special interest or aptitude than as the first step in the ladder of municipal ambition. Little seems to be generally known about the candidates. Nor is much interest generally shown in the elections; though as all the ballot papers are marked by the voter at the same time, voters generally mark their papers for School Trustees as well as for Mayor and Aldermen. The elections are hardly noticed by the press. The arbitrary power of taxation without regard to the general state of the city affairs and finances vested in the Toronto School Board, is defended on the ground of the confidence shown in the appointments by the number of votes cast. The argument might be more conclusive if the election of school trustees was held by itself.

The existing system, as I have already said, is so thoroughly established that any attempt to raise the general question would be futile. At the same time there is a growing feeling, which, if it is founded on natural reason and justice, ought not entirely to be refused recognition. The practical object of this paper is to introduce the memorandum hereto appended on Voluntary Public Schools by Mr. Lawrence Baldwin, who has been carrying on in his school on Avenue Road with apparent success an experiment in the Voluntary direction. His system comprehends open selection of teachers, remuneration in proportion to ability, active participation of parents. At the same time Mr. Baldwin asserts that it meets the legitimate requirements of the State, and that therefore there is no reason why it should be denied recognition in the shape of public inspection.

MEMORANDUM *re* VOLUNTARY PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

The aim of this movement is, shortly, as follows :—

1. To encourage parents to take a personal interest in the education of their own children, and enable them by contributing a voluntary fee to supplement the amount expended through the Public School Board, so that they may obtain a more liberal education. The elementary education covered by the Public School curriculum can thus be supplemented by a grounding in classics, by adding drawing, music, commercial, religious or other special instruction desired by parents.

2. To encourage teachers who have qualified under the Public School system and have also ability to impart such special instruction as is above enumerated, to do so and earn some recompense therefore as supplemental to the salary to which they would be entitled for imparting the ordinary Public School instruction.

3. To economize in the number of Public School buildings. It can reasonably be expected that parents might group themselves according to their common desire for religious instruction, for instance, and in cities nearly all places of worship have attached to them school-houses, which might be made available for the purpose, but these school-houses are now used only on Sundays and are closed up through the week. Ten of such buildings accommodating one hundred pupils each, and representing a total of one thousand, would mean a saving to the Public School Board of about \$50,000 in the capital expenditure, based on what has been done in the Public Schools in Toronto.

It will be seen that no public money is used in the erection of the buildings in which, for instance, religious instruction may be imparted in which the public is not interested, and the desire for religious or other special instruction might induce parents or others to establish these schools and provide suitable buildings. Any grant from the Public School funds would be made only on account of the educational work done on Public School lines. The fact that such schools would be required to employ only qualified Government teachers, use Public School Text Books, and submit to inspection, would be a guarantee of the efficiency of the secular work of the Public Schools.

The experiment made with the Avenue Road Voluntary Public School began in January, 1900, with twelve pupils. We have now an attendance of over thirty, and from an educational standpoint I think I may say that the experiment has proved of value. Our chief difficulty has been in regard to the building, as it was erected in the first instance without any regard to its use as a day school.

The school is managed by a Board of three trustees elected by the parents, and an annual meeting is held in January, when the report of the year's work is presented. In the election of trustees each parent is allowed a vote for each child of his in attendance.











